

# LOS ANGELES COUNTY VETERANS ADVISORY COMMISSION

1816 S. FIGUEROA STREET  
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90015



Ruth A. Wong  
Director

## MINUTES REGULAR MEETING Wednesday, July 8, 2020

### Present:

#### Commissioners

Hector Elizalde  
Tess Banko  
Patricia Jackson-Kelley  
Thomas O'Shaughnessy  
Tom Lasser  
Joe Leal  
Dennis Tucker  
Michael McDowell  
Brittanie Moore

### Absent:

#### Commissioners

Ruel Fuentecilla

### County Department

#### **Military and Veterans Affairs**

Ruth Wong, Director  
Stephanie Guerrero, Secretary

### Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Hector Elizalde called the virtual meeting to order at 1:34 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Army veteran Jose Garcia, IT Technical Support, Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

### Roll Call

There was a total of nine Commissioners at the meeting; quorum present.

### Approval of Minutes

Motion made by Commissioner Lasser to accept the Minutes for June 10, 2020 and seconded by Commissioner McDowell. With no objections, motion passed.

## **Chairman's Report**

Chair Hector Elizalde congratulated Commissioner Jackson-Kelley for her time as Chair and presented her with a scroll signed by Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, 2<sup>nd</sup> District. He then thanked all the Commissioners for their service and continued commitment to serve on the commission to help improve the lives of veterans and families. Here are a few announcements, which will be further discussed at the retreat in August:

1. Strategic Plan – review the Strategic Plan FY 2020-21 and goals checklist; will be sent to you by the secretary
2. Attendance – 10 regular meetings and 2 retreats; please notify secretary if you will not attend
3. Communication with BOS – communicate with BOS liaison; the Board Deputy list will be sent to you
4. Veteran of the Year recognition award
5. Guest Speakers – control the number of speakers and monitor the 10 minutes time allotted (for presentation and Q&A) due to the 1 ½ hour duration of the meeting; all commissioners encouraged to participate and are responsible for introducing the invited speaker
6. Participation and collaboration with Veterans Organizations in each district by attending their events and inviting them to attend VAC meetings

All topics are open for discussion at the retreat in August 2020. All meetings from now and the foreseeable future will be held virtually until further notice. The retreat may be held in-person due to the limited number of Commissioners, as long as social distancing guidelines are being adhered to. More information to come.

## **Homeless Update**

Chair Hector Elizalde reported that Supervisors Kathryn Barger and Mark Ridley-Thomas co-authored a motion to have Homeless Outreach and Mobile Engagement (HOME) teams provide critical treatment interventions for people experiencing homelessness and struggling with mental illness.

## **Building and Tenant Update**

Commissioner Thomas O'Shaughnessy reported the following on Bob Hope Patriotic Hall:

The Hall is currently still closed to the public and to staff (to include MVA and veteran tenant partners in the building). A date has not yet been determined for a soft reopening of the Hall yet, particularly since COVID-19 cases have begun to rise again in positive cases. Weekly virtual reconstitution meetings are taking place each Tuesday at 2:30 P.M. with a committee to analyze and determine how best to re-open the Hall. Currently we are still at the Ground Zero phase in the reconstitution process but are moving towards Phase 1. The costs for determined needs and essential items are currently being explored. There are a few big repair projects that are in need, most recent to include a leak in the basement outside of the Purple Heart Inn. We are currently in the process to determine which of these projects are in greatest and most urgent need of repair.

## **Strategic Plan Update**

Commissioner Tom Lasser stated that the Strategic Plan is valuable and suggested to make it practical and as user friendly as possible. The commission is still working on dialogue for the ordinance that has yet to be approved. He recommends that all commissioners get involved, study it, and review it. Discussion will continue at the retreat.

## **Public Comments**

Latia Suttle is a retired Army Veteran who addressed the commission regarding a status update of the Ad Hoc Committee concerning veterans being identified in Family Court and Children's Court with DCFS, in reference to the white paper that she submitted a few months ago.

Chair Hector Elizalde stated that this was recently brought to his attention. He asked for her patience in that it will not be addressed at this time. It will be reviewed by the committee and will provide her with a satisfactory update.

## **Guest Speakers**

Bob Kurkjian, President, USO West Region, briefed the VAC about the USO in Los Angeles which has been around for about 80 years. The USO has expanded significantly to military spouse and families. They help with food security and work with employees transitioning out of the military. There are two centers that operate in LA County. The first location is the Los Angeles International Airport where they welcome and assist more than 100,000 troops and families annually with 350 volunteers and 3 fulltime staff members. The second location is the Military Entrance Processing Station, Los Angeles in El Segundo; it is the largest single entry point for military inductees. One in 20 members in the military will start their career with the U.S. Military at this location. The staff is there to greet them on the first day to see them through the orientation process. They strive to be an extension of the family that that service member has left behind. The USO program is really about taking that young soldier and helping extend the gratitude of the American people and letting them know that they are here to support them, whether it be through a hug or a birthday cake.

Jake Clark, Founder, Save a Warrior Foundation, is a two time veteran, first in the Cold War era and then in the Post 911 era. He introduced the term anosognosia which is the refusal to accept a diagnosis that is otherwise clinically evident. Save a Warrior began in southern California in 2012 with Warrior Village 1 located in central Ohio. They discovered why most veterans are committing suicide; partially because of anosognosia that they are unaware of and undiagnosed developmental trauma as a child, as well as moral injury in the form of survivor skills of Military Sexual Trauma (MST). Over the last eight years, most of the people coming in have a score of six or above, which means that they are more likely to attempt suicide during their lifetime. The headquarters have relocated to central Ohio and nearly every VA refers veterans to the foundation because of the reputation they have garnered over the last eight years. There have been 1,100 suicidal people come through Save a Warrior; lost four to suicide and about half have a prior attempt. They are planning to establish the national center of excellence work complex in a brand new 8,000 square foot facility for which they have a capital campaign. They do have the construction funds. Currently they have raised about \$2.0 million dollars a year through private donors, grants, and corporate as well as institutional contributors; VA does not contribute any financial support but are very interested in what we do.

Amanda Pertusati, Public Counsel, is joined by her colleague Gigi Lam, Housing Attorney Specialist, to explain the housing resource guide post COVID-19. The LA County Moratorium went into effect on March 4, 2020 through July 21, 2020. It applies to tenants who suffered a financial loss due to the public health crisis, such as job loss and/or stopped working due to school closures. Tenants must notify landlord of the situation preferably in writing of their inability to pay rent. Moratorium delays paying rent; landlord cannot charge late fees and tenant has one year to pay back. Another important factor is that tenants can still be evicted based on health and safety violations. The only thing that the Moratorium prevents is the inability to pay rent evictions. A landlord could still come up with other reasons to evict the tenant, such as leaving their trash outside or other nuisances. Both the Moratoriums apply to residential, commercial buildings, and mobile homes. The landlord cannot retaliate with harassment for the tenant exercising their rights. Expect a massive unlawful detainer and a very quick timeline within five days to respond – LA County provides legal help. Depending on the SPA or service provider area that the veteran lives in, they can get a referral for legal assistance; this can help answer the questions or will represent them in the upcoming trial. It is important seek help by doing the following: 1. Get legal assistance 2. Need to access SSVF services. This will help veterans and families with rent to prevent the unlawful detainer or perhaps buy time so they don't have to move out.

## **Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Report**

Ruth Wong, Director, provided the following updates:

Statement from Department Heads relating to racial injustice demonstrated throughout the County –

We, the Department Heads of the County of Los Angeles, recognize and affirm that all people are created equal and are entitled to all rights afforded by the Constitution of the United States. We acknowledge that as government leaders serving the most populous and diverse county in the nation, we have an opportunity to change the narrative on the role of government and its relationship to the communities it serves.

Collectively, the work of our departments have far-reaching impacts on all aspects of our residents' lives, particularly in the areas of employment, land use, education, voting, housing, health, arts and museums, infrastructure, justice, veteran services, environmental protections, community and social services, and ensuring a fair and equitable marketplace. Many of the inequities that the work of our departments address are the result of systemic racism and discrimination. We stand against racism in any form and pledge to use our offices to advance racial and social equity, diversity, and fairness.

We will continue to work with renewed purpose to build on progress made in partnership with our Board, employees, customers and the communities we serve to improve quality of life and foster vibrant and powerful communities for all of Los Angeles County.

DMVA – Patriotic Hall has been closed since March 16. MVA Staff has been teleworking and there are no COVID cases in the department. There has been an increase in our call center of up to 7,000 phone calls. Online courses offered to staff to support professional development. The Director of Public Health gave a briefing of the rise in COVID-19; over 2,000 hospitalizations, positivity rate has increased to 11 percent, and 65 deaths in the last day alone. The reopening of county buildings is going to be a little longer than anticipated. Although the reopening plans for Patriotic Hall continues, the actual implementation may not be for quite a while.

County – Los Angeles County has a severe budget deficit due to COVID-19 Health Order and void of sales tax. Last week, the Board adopted an 8 percent cut across each county department. For MVA, it amounts to \$452,000; two staff positions, a decrease in security and custodial services, as well as services, supplies, and overtime budget was cut.

COVID-19 – Monday and Wednesday briefings are held by CEO with Department Heads. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, DMVA holds executive staff briefings including a number of Board Deputies and Commissioners.

CACVSO funding – Last month I reported on working with Senator Archuleta's office who was championing a bill to request \$5.4 million. The funds would help with COVID-19 impacted and homeless veterans. Unfortunately, this budget ask was not adopted so we were not funded, but that doesn't mean that we will stop the momentum on this request.

Safe Parking Program – One vehicle currently parked overnight in our lot. Biweekly meetings continue with VOA, LAHSA, and CEO to increase communications on this project.

Virtual event – MVA continues to plan a virtual tribute to recognize the Chinese Americans who served in WW II that have been honored with the Congressional Gold Medal. The event will be held on September 2, 2020. Army and Air Force Chief of Staff and Supervisor Barger will provide a virtual message for this event.

Operation Welcome Home – In June, over 500 packets of information were mailed out to newly separated service members. A number of them have requested an appointment with a Veteran Service Officer and four claims have been developed.

Veterans Credit Preference Policy – MVA staff in addition to working with DHR and County Counsel, is reviewing a Veterans Credit Preference Policy and looking at the 2005 federal guidelines to ensure that the language is in alignment.

Barstow Veterans Home – The Governor's budget did include a directive regarding the Barstow Veterans Home. During 2020-21 fiscal year, he has asked for a report to the legislature by February 2021; that there be at least three stakeholder meetings conducted in order to hear from veteran groups. He wants to hear about a number of things including deferred maintenance associated with the home and a description of prior actions taken to increase occupancy of the home.

#### **Agenda Items that are Deferred to Next Month's Meeting**

None.

#### **Follow-Up on Veteran Issues**

Commissioner Banko wanted to recognize the recent murder of Vanessa Guillen of Fort Hood and that it is a very challenging time for the women veterans community because it has stirred up a lot of difficult feelings regarding Military Sexual Trauma (MST), of not being heard, and unprotected by superiors and those around us during time served in the military. It is important to provide resources to the community for behavioral health. CalVet Women Veterans will be having a Wellness webinar for healthy minds and bodies, meditation, and yoga breathing techniques for mental health on July 15th; will forward information to all. Chair Hector Elizalde agrees and recommends that Commissioner Banko give an introduction of this subject matter at the retreat.

Commissioner Tucker suggested Stuart Chan for the September meeting as he is a great resource for the Chinese Veteran Community.

Commissioner Lasser suggested a guest speaker for Long Beach VA and stated that he will work on securing someone.

### **Good of the Order**

Vice Chair Tess Banko stated that this is a hard time for veterans and families in isolation. Veteran Family and Wellness Center has created "Power Up Your Parenting" courses made up of six sessions of parenting training of various topics, such as communication and keeping your cool in challenging situations. She gave a friendly reminder of the upcoming events in the community:

- 7/17, 11:30am-1:00pm – Luncheon with the Defense Brain Injury Center (traumatic brain injury awareness in knowing the signs, understanding the symptoms and knowing what to do next will be provided by two experts)
- 7/18, 12:30-3:30pm – Military Civilian Workshop by Leadership Pasadena for employment

Commissioner Joe Leal stated that he is now seeing female veterans open up about their personal experiences since the tragedy of Vanessa Guillen. He thanked Chairman Hector Elizalde from a congressional standpoint for his assistance with veteran requests. Phone calls continue to increase and he addresses every call with a warm hand-off.

Commissioner Patricia Jackson-Kelley stated that she has been working with several organizations within the community about SFC Vanessa Guillen. Please call the house service committee at 202-225-4451 to request a congressional intervention. There are several groups that have combined themselves together to address this issue and updates can be found on Facebook.

Commissioner Dennis Tucker stated that he is looking forward to the retreat next month. There will be a three part series related to the VA Master Plan. Part one involves transportation called "the Ride." The Purple Line extension for Metro will be a 9-mile heavy rail transit subway to include stops at Century City, West Los Angeles VA, and UCLA. The VA reviewed the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) on July 5, 2019 and agreed it is very beneficial. The nine mile course will include stops on the VA campus. He will brief the Commission on updates as needed.

Commissioner Thom O'Shaughnessy stated that he reached out to Director Wong and Board Deputy about having a Public Safety Justice plank added to the Strategic Plan. He has been working with Commissioner Tucker to create language on why they feel this plank needs to be added. The LAR-CVEB statement for West Los Angeles VA campus and master plan has been submitted, therefore, he will send it to all commissioners. He believes that Lieutenant Colonel Franklin deserves great accolade for his 21 years of service in the U.S. Army, serving in combat and on the national city council.

Commissioner Tom Lasser stated that the LA Air Force Base is having a change command virtual ceremony in one week; he will send the information to the Commission. Colonel IGL is also retiring after a 32 year career and is relocating back to the east coast to be with her family. The new commander is Colonel Becky Pierce is taking over and he will see if she can visit to give a presentation of what's going on up there.

### **Adjournment**

Angela Madsen, Marine veteran and 3x Paralympian who aimed to be the first paraplegic and oldest woman to row the Pacific Ocean. She had been at sea completely alone for 60 days. Her voyage from Los Angeles to Honolulu was a documentary film. She was checking in with filmmakers and her wife, Debra, frequently via satellite. After not hearing from her for several hours, a search and rescue was initiated. They confirmed she was dead upon arrival by the Coast Guard on Monday, June 22, 2020. Angela was a warrior, as fierce as they come. To row an ocean solo was her biggest goal because being at sea made her happier than anything else. She was one of guest speakers at the women's event held here at Patriotic Hall 2 years ago. She was a very special lady and it's so sad to see her go.

A total of 27 participants were in attendance. Meeting adjourned at 3:29 p.m.

Stephanie Guerrero  
Secretary  
July 8, 2020